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ABSTRACT

This paper was developed to help counselors of students with learning disabilities plan for college, by answering common student questions and providing sources of additional information. Sections of the paper discuss: (1) developing self knowledge (using compensatory learning strategies, knowing one's own strengths and weaknesses, and practicing self-advocacy); (2) understanding legal rights and responsibilities (especially relevant federal legislation, changing levels of responsibility, and privacy rights); (3) transition planning for college (evaluating college options, documenting the learning disability, and course selection/accommodative services); (4) the college application process (creating a short list, caution about course waivers and substitutions, admissions tests and accommodations, application and disclosure, and making a college choice); and (5) selected organizational and print resources for additional information. (DB)

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ED 391 285

GETTING READY FOR COLLEGE: ADVISING HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

Increasing numbers of students with learning disabilities are enrolling in two- and four-year colleges and universities. Since 1985, among first-time, full-time freshmen who reported having any disability, the percentage of those with learning disabilities doubled from 15 percent to 32 percent. Currently nearly a third of all freshmen with disabilities report having learning disabilities.

Some of the most frequently asked questions of the HEATH staff are about students with learning disabilities who are preparing to make the transition from high school to college. In addition, HEATH staff are asked many questions by students with learning disabilities who plan to enroll in graduate school, including law school and medical school. Such questions indicate that students with learning disabilities can, and do have successful undergraduate experiences. High school students with learning disabilities who are considering going to college should be encouraged to pursue this goal.

Students should be aware that colleges and universities are not all alike. Their missions or purposes, entrance criteria, programs of study, and requirements for certifications, associate degrees, and baccalaureate degrees vary. Similarly, students with learning disabilities are not all alike. Their goals, strengths and weaknesses vary. Also, people change their minds—plans and goals change over time. The student who enrolls in a vocational certification program in a two-year community college today may be the student who completes a baccalaureate degree program in a four–year university tomorrow.

Students with learning disabilities, who will choose to continue their formal education beyond high school, ***need to take a variety of preparatory steps to get ready for college while in high school.*** In addition, they need to make real choices regarding their goals after high school well before their senior years to maximize their options.

This paper was developed to help in that process by answering many of the questions that students have, and listing sources of additional information. While **Getting Ready for College** was designed for high school students with learning disabilities, this paper should also be useful to those who advise students in their college-search process, including parents, teachers, and guidance counselors. Unless otherwise specified, information in this Resource Paper is based on the writers' participation in numerous workshops and national conferences, materials collected by HEATH staff, and conversations with successful college students with disabilities, as well as experienced campus Disability Support Services officers. Additional information can be obtained by contacting the organizations or consulting the publications included in the **Selected Resources** section at the end of this paper. The following ideas will be explored within this paper:

DEVELOPING SELF KNOWLEDGE
UNDERSTANDING LEGAL RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES
TRANSITION PLANNING FOR COLLEGE
COLLEGE APPLICATION PROCESS

DEVELOPING SELF KNOWLEDGE

Successful college students with learning disabilities, college advisors, as well as campus Disability Support Services staff agree that developing knowledge about one's self — the nature of one's learning disabilities as well as one's personal and academic strengths and weaknesses — is vital in getting ready for college.

Students need to become familiar with how they learn best.

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Many successful students with learning disabilities acquire compensatory learning strategies to help them use the knowledge they have accumulated, to plan, complete and evaluate projects, and to take an active role in shaping their environments. They need to learn how to apply strategies flexibly, and how to modify or create strategies fluently to fit new learning situations. For example, compensatory strategies may include:

- allowing more time to complete tests, papers, and other projects,
- listening to audio tapes of text books while reading,
- making up words to remind students to use the knowledge they have.

For example:

F.O.I.L. (First Outer Inner Last) to remember the sequence of steps in solving algebra problems when in school,

P.A.L. (Practice Alert Listening) when talking with friends and family, at work, and in school, or

U.S.E. (Use Strategies Every day).

All students learn from experience. Those with learning disabilities need to exercise their judgment, make mistakes, self-identify them, and correct them. Learning new information in a new setting, such as a college classroom or dormitory, can be frustrating. Set-backs are an inevitable part of the learning process, but can impair self-esteem, which is essential to taking responsibility for one's life. Self-esteem is built and rebuilt one day at a time. Students need explicit strategies to monitor and restore their self-esteem.

Some students have difficulty understanding or making themselves understood by their peers, families, and instructors. For example, some learning disabilities may affect timing in conversations, or decisions about when to study and when to socialize. Students need to really think about how motivated they are. They should ask themselves these questions:

- Do I really want to go to college and work harder than I ever did before?
- Am I really ready to manage my social life?

In order to gain self knowledge, HEATH staff suggest the following ideas:

Become familiar with one's own learning disability. Since the professional documentation of the learning disability is the vehicle for understanding one's strengths and weaknesses it is essential that each student has a full and frank discussion about that documentation with his or her parents as well as the psychologist or other expert who assessed the student. Students may want to ask questions such as:

What is the extent of the disability?

What are my strengths? How do I learn best?

Are there strategies that I can use to learn despite these disabilities?

[Note: See discussion on page 5 about Documentation of a Learning Disability.]

Learn to be "self-advocates" while still in high school! Self-advocates are people who can speak up in logical, clear and positive language to communicate about their needs. Self-advocates take responsibility for themselves. To be a self-advocate, each student must learn to understand his or her particular type of learning disability, and the resultant academic strengths and weaknesses. They must be aware of their own learning styles. Most importantly, high school students with learning disabilities need to become comfortable with describing to others both their disability and their academic-related needs. At the college level, the student alone will hold the responsibility for self-identification and advocacy.

Practice self-advocacy while still in high school. Many students with learning disabilities develop self-advocacy skills through participating in the discussions to determine the Individualized Education Program (IEP) and/or the Individualized Transition Plan (ITP). Armed with knowledge about learning strengths and weaknesses, the student can be a valued member of the planning team.

Develop strengths and learn about areas of interest. Students with learning disabilities, as do others, often participate in sports, music, or social activities after school. Others try working in a variety of jobs or community volunteer projects. Activities in which a student can excel can help to build the self-esteem necessary to succeed in other areas.

UNDERSTANDING LEGAL RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Recent legislation protects the rights of people with disabilities. In order to be effective self-advocates, students need to be informed about this legislation. It is

especially important to know about the **Rehabilitation Act of 1973** (especially **Section 504**), the **Americans with Disabilities Act** (ADA) of 1990 and how they differ from the **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act** (IDEA) of 1990. In addition the **Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act** (FERPA) of 1974 protects the confidentiality of student records, which is very important for students with learning disabilities and their families to understand.

UNDERSTANDING LEGAL RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

IDEA, Section 504, and ADA: Understanding the Differences
Understanding the Changes in Level of Responsibility
Understanding Your Rights to Privacy

IDEA, Section 504, and ADA: Understanding the Differences

High school students with learning disabilities must understand their rights under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) (which guarantee the civil rights of persons with disabilities) and how these differ from the rights and services they received under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Under IDEA, which is the legislation that guarantees a free appropriate public education and governs the provision of special education services to students with disabilities in elementary and secondary schools, *the **school** is responsible* for identifying students with disabilities, for providing all necessary assessments, and for monitoring the provision of special education services. These special education services, which are described in detail in a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) and Individualized Transition Plan (ITP), could significantly alter the requirements of the "standard" high school academic program. Re-quirements for high school diplomas may be changed under IDEA, as well. For example, dependent on their particular disabilities, some students' programs of study under IDEA may not include certain language, mathematics, or science courses that are usually required courses for a diploma.

However, *IDEA does not apply to higher education.* Colleges and universities do not offer "special" education. Under Section 504 and the ADA, colleges and universities are prohibited from discriminating against a person because of disability. Institutions must provide reasonable modifications, accommodations, or auxiliary aids which will enable qualified students to have access to, participate in, and benefit from the full range of the educational programs and activities which are offered to all students on campus. Examples which may assist students with learning disabilities include, but are not limited to, the use of readers, notetakers, extra time to complete exams, and/or alternate test formats.

Decisions regarding the exact accommodations to be provided are made on an individualized basis, and the college or university has the flexibility to select the specific aid or service it provides, as long as it is effective. Colleges and universities are not required by law to provide aides, services, or devices for personal use or study.

Unlike elementary and secondary schools, postsecondary institutions are not required to design special academic programs for students with disabilities. Postsecondary institutions are required to provide accommodative services so that qualified students with disabilities will have equal access to the regular academic program. After equal access is provided, it is everyone's own responsibility to do well, or not do well. Section 504 and the ADA do not require postsecondary institutions to alter their requirements for either admissions or for graduation.

Understanding the Changes in Level of Responsibility

Students with learning disabilities need to know that the level of responsibility regarding the provision of services changes after high school. As mentioned above, throughout the elementary and secondary years, it is the responsibility of the school system to identify students with disabilities and to initiate the delivery of special education services. However, while Section 504 and the ADA require postsecondary institutions to provide accommodative services to students with disabilities, once the student has been admitted to a college or university *it is the student's responsibility to **self-identify** and **provide documentation of the disability.*** The college or university will not provide any accommodation until a student takes the following two steps:

- Step 1. The enrolled student who needs accommodative services must "self-identify." That means he or she must go to the Office of Disability Support Services, or the office (or person) on campus responsible for providing ser-

vices to students with disabilities, and request services.

- Step 2. He or she must provide documentation of his or her disability. For the student with a learning disability, such documentation is often a copy of his or her testing report and/or a copy of the IEP or ITP.

Understanding Your Rights to Privacy

Students and their families are often concerned about who will be able to see their educational records. They want to be sure that written records will be confidential and available only to those with a legitimate interest in them. To protect the privacy of student records the **Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act** (FERPA) was passed in 1974 and later amended several times. FERPA is also known as the Buckley Amendment in recognition of Senator James Buckley of New York who introduced it.

FERPA gives students the right to have access to their educational records, consent to release a record to a third party, challenge information in those records, and be notified of their privacy rights. FERPA affects all colleges and universities which receive federal funds. FERPA rights belong to the student regardless of age (and to the parents of a dependent student — as defined by the Internal Revenue Service). A "student" is a person who attends college or university and/or for whom the institution maintains educational records (former students and alumni, for example) but not applicants to the institution or those denied admission. The college must inform students of their FERPA rights, procedures to allow a student access to his or her record, and procedures to consent to release a record to a third party. Publishing this information in a catalogue or bulletin satisfies this requirement.

FERPA protects a student's record from being shared (without the student's permission) with "curious" faculty, administrators, other students, the press, or anyone without a legitimate reason for seeing the record.

According to **Subpart E: The Impact of Section 504 on Postsecondary Education,** a publication of the Association on Higher Education and Disability - AHEAD (see **Selected Resources** section) the following information is provided about confidentiality.

> Any information regarding disability gained from medical examinations or appropriate post-admissions inquiry shall be considered confidential and shall be shared with others within the institution on a need-to-know basis only. In other words, other individuals shall have access to disability-related information only in-so-far as it impacts on their functioning or involvement with that individual. . . .
>
> For example, faculty members do not have a right or a need to access diagnostic or other information regarding a student's disability. They only need to know what accommodations are necessary/appropriate to meet the student's disability-related needs, and then only with permission of the student. . . .
>
> Disability-related information should be kept in separate files with access limited to appropriate personnel. Documentation of disability should be held by a single source within the institution in order to protect the confidentiality of persons with disabilities by assuring such limited access. (Page 37.)

TRANSITION PLANNING FOR COLLEGE

Leaving high school is an eventuality that all students face. Under the IDEA preparing for this transition has been formalized by requiring that the IEP for each student receiving special education services include a statement of the transition services needed. In many locations the IEP becomes an Individualized Transition Plan, or ITP. It documents the student's disabilities, describes specific courses for the student to take, accommodative services for the school to provide, notes post-high school plans, and identifies linkages with relevant community agencies, such as Vocational Rehabilitation Services. Students with learning disabilities planning to go to college are encouraged to take an active part in the transition planning process. Of particular importance in transition planning are the following:

TRANSITION PLANNING FOR COLLEGE

College Options

Documentation of a Learning Disability

Course Selection and Accommodative Services

College Options

Students with learning disabilities who are planning to go to college should make themselves aware of the general categories of postsecondary educational institutions. Knowing the type of college one will attend affects the student's course selections while still in high school. There are over 3,000 colleges and universities in the United States. In addition to varying in size, scope of program offered, setting (urban, suburban, or rural), residential or commuter, and cost of attendance, there are several factors of special importance for students with learning disabilities.

Admissions Criteria:

Some colleges have ***open admissions.*** These colleges admit anyone over age 18 or with a high school diploma. At some colleges with open admissions, however, alternate diplomas or certificates of completion may not be acceptable for admission. Students must check with the college to be sure that the earned high school completion document will meet admissions criteria. Standardized college admissions testing is not required at open admissions colleges, nor is any particular high school course selection. Grades in high school are not relevant. Open admissions colleges may be two-year or four-year. They usually do require students to take a "placement exam" to determine at which level to begin college course work. Students who have not taken an academic preparatory program in high school may need to complete some high school level courses before taking college courses for credit toward a college degree. Such courses are usually available as remedial courses and may be taken at the college.

Other colleges have **selective admissions** requirements. Applicants to selective colleges must meet the criteria set by that particular college. Schools with selective criteria may look for students with high grade point averages, rigorous academic preparation, high scores on the standardized college admissions tests, and strong personal qualities and evidence of achievement. Some colleges are more selective than others. Some standard, commercially available college guides list colleges by the degree of selectivity, or "how hard it is to get in" — from "most difficult" to "minimally difficult." Selective colleges may require applicants to submit high school grade point average and rank in class, scores on standardized admissions tests (SAT or ACT), and letters of recommendation. Some may require a personal interview, and some may be particularly interested in the student's extracurricular activities.

Types of Institutions:

Two-year colleges are most frequently public community colleges located in urban, suburban, and rural areas across the United States. Most are open admissions institutions and are non-residential. Some are independent (private) junior colleges which encourage students to earn an Associate Degree. Community colleges attract students who choose to take either a few selected courses in their interest area, vocational courses to train for specific jobs, as well as those who pursue an undergraduate certificate (to study a specific field of training), or an Associate Degree, some of whom plan to transfer to a four-year institution.

Four-year colleges or universities may be open enrollment or selective. Most require students to pursue a degree, and many are residential. Four-year colleges are also located in various settings, and in small communities they may be the center of cultural life. Tuition, room, board, and books are generally more expensive per year than the cost of attendance at a community college.

Colleges with programs for students with learning disabilities: Hundreds of colleges and universities have comprehensive programs on campus specially designed for students with learning disabilities. Staffed by individuals trained in the area of learning disabilities, these programs offer — in addition to the standard services offered by the campus as a whole — services that go above and beyond making a program accessible. Examples include tutoring services, either in students' coursework or in general areas of deficit, such as study skills, organizational skills, or time management. Counseling services may also be provided — personal, academic, or vocational. As the services provided in such programs do go above and beyond those that the college or university is required to provide under Section 504 and ADA, many colleges and universities charge for these services above the tuition fee. (Services required by Section 504 and ADA are provided at no cost to the student).

It is also possible that such programs have their own separate admissions requirements. Students who wish to learn more about such programs should either call each of the colleges and universities that they are interested in and ask if such a program exists on campus, or check one of the many guidebooks found in public libraries and bookstores that contain listings of, and information about, such programs. (See the **Selected Resources** section of this paper for further information about such guidebooks.)

Documentation of a Learning Disability

A high school student with a learning disability is one who has been evaluated by professionals. Such professionals (a school psychologist or educational diagnostician), after reviewing the results of various tests and other evidence, provide for each student a written diagnosis that a learning disability exists. Recommendations for accommodative services and programs are also usually

part of the written document. This document can serve as a vehicle for the student to understand his or her strengths and weaknesses, as well as a "ticket" to obtain the accommodative services necessary to participate in regular college programs. There are several points for a student planning to go to college to keep in mind concerning the documentation of a learning disability:

• IDEA requires reevaluations to be conducted at least every three years, therefore, students with learning disabilities may be wise to have a comprehensive reevaluation conducted close to high school graduation time. This will ensure, for students who are going directly into postsecondary education, that the documentation that they take with them will be timely.

• If the student is unable to be evaluated close to graduation from high school, it is possible that a college or university, after receiving documentation, may decide that the documentation is too old. This may occur if the college or university feels that the information does not adequately describe the student's current academic strengths and weaknesses, learning styles, etc. Such current information can be invaluable in determining the most appropriate accommodations for the student. While an agreed upon definition does not exist within the postsecondary/disability community of "how old is too old," evidence from the field suggests a range of two-five years. While it is ultimately the student's responsibility to obtain necessary documentation, some colleges and universities do provide testing services. Students should ask about campus-based possibilities before going to a private diagnostician.

• Students and parents should study and discuss the documentation in order to fully understand what it conveys about the student's strengths, weaknesses, and recommended accommodative services. If the report is not clear, discuss it with the school psychologist or whoever has prepared it.

• *Many high schools routinely destroy copies of student records after a predetermined number of years. As students with learning disabilities will need copies of select items in their records to show to the college or university as documentation of their disability, students should make sure that they have complete copies of all of their records upon leaving high school.*

Course Selection and Accommodative Services

Students with learning disabilities should consider various college options as well as their academic strengths and weaknesses in planning their high school program. Students seeking admission to selective institutions MUST meet the criteria set by the college. Students planning to attend a non-selective college should check to see if the high school diploma or certificate of attendance meets the entrance criteria.

Successful college students with learning disabilities report that high school courses teaching keyboard skills and word processing are especially important. A high school transcript displaying successful completion of a wide array of courses (science, math, history, literature, foreign language, art, music) are attractive to selective college admissions staff. Involvement in school or community sponsored clubs, teams, or performances also enhance a college admission candidate's application.

Students interested in any of the emerging technical careers should explore the tech-prep programs available in many areas. Such tech-prep programs include a partnership between secondary vocational-technical schools and postsecondary institutions — most often community colleges. These tech-prep programs help people prepare for careers in such areas as engineering technology; applied science; mechanical, industrial, practical art, or trade; or agriculture; health; or business. They offer both classroom instruction and practical work-based experience.

Accommodative services are essential to the success of many students with learning disabilities. Prior to the ITP meeting at which the services will be listed, students should try out various accommodations which have proven successful to others. These may include:

- listening to a tape recording of written material while reading it,
- using extended time to complete exams (usually time and a half),
- using a computer to write out exams or papers,
- taking the exam in a quiet place without distraction of other students or intrusive noises.

In addition, students with learning disabilities may benefit from mini-courses in study skills, assertiveness training, and time management. The importance of

listing the accommodative services for each student in the ITP cannot be emphasized strongly enough. The types of accommodations students may receive when taking standardized college admissions tests or licensing examinations may depend on the evidence of having received them in high school.

COLLEGE APPLICATION PROCESS

For students with learning disabilities to assume responsibility for college application processes, they need to have an accurate idea of what they have to offer colleges. They also need to have an accurate idea of the academic requirements and admission procedures of the colleges or universities in which they are interested. Successful college students with learning disabilities advise that the actual college application process should begin as early as possible — in one's high school junior year. That is the time to review the documentation of the learning disabilities and work on understanding strengths, weaknesses, learning styles, and accommodative services. In addition, the following activities are part of the process and will be discussed in this section.

COLLEGE APPLICATION PROCESS

Creating a Short List

Caution about Course Waivers and Substitutions

Admissions Tests and Accommodations

Application and Disclosure

Making a College Choice

Creating a Short List

The staff of the HEATH Resource Center are often asked for a list of colleges or universities that are best for students with learning disabilities. Our answer is always the same — HEATH does not compile such a list because different schools are better for different students for different reasons. HEATH staff do go on to suggest the following:

* First, the student, parents, and anyone else that is important to the college-search process should make a short list of six to ten schools that the student is interested in. *The key at this point is to temporarily set aside any disability-related concerns.* Create the short-list according to all other factors that are important, just as any student going through the college-search process might. These factors may include: components of various academic programs offered, admissions-related requirements, cost, opportunities for financial aid, location, community resources, athletics, social activities, as well as others. The reason for putting disability-related concerns aside at this point is that, under Section 504 and the ADA, **all** schools are required to provide accommodative services to qualified students with disabilities, including students with learning disabilities.

* *After the first version of the short list is created, bring disability-related concerns back into the picture.* Now work to refine the short list by becoming familiar with the services that are provided to students with learning disabilities at each of the colleges or universities on the list. Most colleges and universities today have a Disability Support Services Office (which may also be called Special Student Services, or Disability Resource Center, or a similar name) or a person designated by the college president to coordinate services for students with disabilities. Some schools have comprehensive learning disabilities programs.

* *Personally visit, preferably while classes are in session,* so that you can get an impression of campus daily life, or talk by telephone with the staff of the Disability Support Services Office or the learning disabilities program. Campus staff may be able to give only general answers to questions of students who have not yet been admitted and for whom they have not reviewed any documentation. Nevertheless, a student can get a good idea about the nature of the college by asking questions such as:

  • Does this college require standardized college admissions test scores? If so, what is the range of scores for those admitted?

  • For how many students with learning disabilities does the campus currently provide services?

  • What are their major fields of study?

  • What types of academic accommodations are typically provided to students with learning disabilities on your campus?

  • Will this college provide the specific accommodations that I need?

  • What records or documentation of a learning disability are necessary to arrange academic - accommodations for admitted students?

  • How is the confidentiality of applicants' records, as well as those of enrolled students, protected? Where does the college publish Family Education Rights and Privacy Act guidelines which I can review?

- How is information related to the documentation of a learning disability used? By whom?
- Does the college or university have someone available who is trained and understands the needs of adults with learning disabilities?
- What academic and personal characteristics have been found important for students with learning disabilities to succeed at this college?
- How many students with learning disabilities have graduated in the past five years?
- What is the tuition? Are there additional fees for learning disabilities–related services? If so, what services beyond those required by Section 504 and the ADA do you get for those fees?

In addition to talking with college staff, try to arrange a meeting with several college students with learning disabilities and talk with them about the services they receive and their experiences on campus. Such a meeting can be requested at the time of scheduling the interview with the college staff.

While you will certainly be interested in the answers to the questions, the impressions that you get during the conversations will be equally important and may serve as a way to make final refinements to the short list. (HEATH's **How to Choose a College: Guide for the Student with a Disability** contains more detailed advice.)

Caution about Course Waivers and Substitutions

Colleges and universities are not required to alter admissions requirements, nor are they required to alter programmatic requirements for students with learning disabilities once they have been admitted. Students should keep such factors in mind when creating their short lists. For example, a student with a math-related learning disability would be poorly advised to accept admission at a university on the assumption that the math-requirements will be waived once that student is admitted. While colleges and universities need to give consideration to requests of students with learning disabilities for course waivers and substitutions, such waivers and substitutions are not often granted. If the campus academic committee, to whom a request for waiver is made, determines that the course in question is not an essential component of the student's course of study, it is possible that a waiver will be granted. Substitutions of other courses which convey the essential elements of the requirement (such as substituting a course in the culture of another country for a course in foreign language) are more readily granted than waivers, according to reports from the field. However, if the course in question is found to be an essential element to the student's course of study or the degree sought, it is unlikely that a waiver or a substitution would be granted. Therefore, passing such a course would continue to be a requirement for graduation. Remember, accommodative services, including the provision of course waivers and substitutions, are not to be used in a way that would lower academic standards established by the college or university.

Admissions Tests and Accommodations

If the colleges on the student's short list require standardized test scores, the following information is important to understand. With proper documentation, high school students with learning disabilities may take standardized college admissions tests, such as the PSAT, SAT, and ACT, with individually determined accommodations. Examples of such accommodations for students with learning disabilities may include:

- individual administration of the test,
- audiocassette tape or large print test editions,
- special answer sheets,
- extended testing time.

However, the rules and procedures for taking each of the standardized tests with accommodations varies, and students should contact the agency that administers each standardized test that he or she will need to take for specific information. Contact information for the testing agencies is provided in the **Selected Resources** section of this paper.

As is the case with each of the steps in the college search process, starting early is better than starting late. Do not wait until the last minute to contact these agencies. The tests are given across the country on specific dates only. It is the responsibility of the student to request information and accommodations in a timely fashion in order to meet the standard timelines and requirements of the agency.

Again, any accommodative service given by a testing agency to a student with a learning disability is solely meant to give that student equal footing in the testing environment. It is then every student's responsibility to do well, or not do well. Tests taken by students with disabilities are scored in the same fashion as

those taken by students without disabilities. Scores of tests taken under a non-standard administration (that is, those taken with accommodations) are so noted when they are reported to the schools.

Application and Disclosure

Once students have decided on the final version of their short-list, it is time to begin the formal application process. To apply to any college, candidates must complete a form — usually one designed by the particular college — formally requesting admission. Such forms cover basic information about the prospective student. **The form may not, however, require the student to disclose whether or not he or she has a disability.** In addition, the student must usually supply the college with an official transcript of high school grades. Some colleges require the student to write and send a personal essay, and obtain letters of recommendation from teachers and others who can speak for the student's ability to succeed in college. Some colleges may be especially interested in evidence of a candidate's performance ability in sports, the arts, or other talents.

At this time the student will need to decide whether or not to "disclose" the fact that he or she has a disability. (Colleges and universities attempting to overcome past discrimination or wishing to voluntarily overcome past effects of limited participation by students with disabilities may ***invite*** applicants for admission to indicate the existence of disabilities on the application form, but may not ***require*** the applicant to respond to this pre-admission inquiry.) However, should a student decide to disclose his or her disability, this information in and of itself can not be used as a basis for denying admission. Colleges and universities can not discriminate solely on the basis of disability. On the other hand, colleges and universities are also under no obligation to alter their admissions requirements or standards. This means that having a learning disability, or any disability, does not entitle a student to admission at any college or university. Students with disabilities, like all other prospective applicants, must meet the admissions criteria established by the college or university.

College level admissions committees do, however, often maintain a degree of flexibility with regard to the particular qualifications that they look for in prospective students. As a result, HEATH staff often suggest that high school students with learning disabilities consider the option of disclosing their disability during the application process (either through a required essay and/or during the personal interview, if there is one). By disclosing the disability the student may explain possible discrepancies within various pieces of admissions documents. For example, a student with a learning disability may present a high school transcript with excellent grades, but may also submit SAT scores that are quite low. Or, another student may present high SAT scores, while transcript grades are varied. Such discrepancies are typical of a student with a learning disability. However, if an admissions committee is not aware that such discrepant information is being presented by a student with a learning disability, admission may be denied.

Disclosure of a learning disability does not guarantee admission. It can, however, offer the student the opportunity to provide the admissions committee with additional insights. For example, within a required essay, the student may explain his or her learning disability, and how the disability accounts for any discrepancies in his or her academic record. Students might convey an understanding of their learning disability, and how academic strengths and weaknesses mesh with interests in specific courses and fields of study. Students may also go on to state plans for managing their learning disability at the college level, and describe how they would work with the Office of Disability Support Services, noting their understanding of the student's responsibilities in making his or her college career successful.

Making a College Choice

After understanding his or her particular academic strengths and weaknesses, narrowing down the short list, visiting campuses, taking standardized college admissions tests if necessary, and completing the applications, students will be faced with making a choice among those colleges which have offered admission. Students who have worked hard at getting ready for college will be able to identify the school which seems "right."

IN THE MEANTIME

In addition to becoming familiar with all of the tips and procedures discussed in this paper, there are a number of additional ways that high school students with learning disabilities can prepare for college. In order to make themselves more attractive candidates, students should consider the following:

- Take courses in high school

that will help prepare for college. If appropriate, take foreign language credits and computer training while still in high school.

• Consider internships, or part-time jobs, or volunteer community service that will develop necessary skills.

• Consider enrolling in a summer pre-college program specifically designed for students with learning disabilities in either the summer before or after the high school senior year. Such short-term experiences (most programs are designed to last anywhere from one week to one month) have been shown to be incredibly helpful in giving students a feel for what college or university life will be like. (Each spring, HEATH produces **Summer Pre-College Programs for Students with Learning Disabilities** which is a listing of select programs across the country).

• Contact the local Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agency and investigate eligibility requirements. VR agencies may offer a variety of services to eligible students with learning disabilities, including vocational assessment, tuition assistance, or testing services.

• Explore sources of financing the college education. Most families need financial assistance to pay the costs of attending college. While there is very little scholarship money specifically for students with learning disabilities, readers are encouraged to review the HEATH paper, **Financial Aid for Students with Disabilities**.

• Become familiar with, and practice using, the various compensatory strategies identified earlier in this paper. For example, students may want to practice talking to their high school teachers and administrators about their academic strengths and weaknesses and the ways in which they compensate for their learning disabilities.

• Join one of the national organizations which provide support not only to students with learning disabilities, but also to parents and professionals, as well. Participation in the activities of such organizations is an excellent way to build confidence, to increase disability awareness and disability-related knowledge, and to get information about special programs and resources. (HEATH's **Resource Directory** and **National Resources for Adults with Learning Disabilities** provide brief descriptions of these national organizations as well as complete contact information.)

A MESSAGE TO STUDENTS

Awareness of your strengths, your advocacy skills, and persistence are among the most important tools you can use to build your future through education. You can maximize the range of colleges that may admit you by playing an active role in high school, getting appropriate support, continually assessing your growth, and carefully planning. Students may be admitted only to colleges and universities to which **they actually apply.** More students who have learning disabilities than ever before are applying to, enrolling in, and graduating from America's colleges and universities. You can join the growing number of undergraduates who have learning disabilities. Good luck in getting ready for college.

SELECTED RESOURCES

Learning Disability Advocacy Organizations

Learning Disabilities Association of America (LDA)
4156 Library Road
Pittsburgh, PA 15234
(412) 341-1515
(412) 344-0224 (Fax)

LDA is a non-profit, 60,000 member national organization and referral service. It provides free information on learning disabilities and puts an inquirer in contact with one of 700 local chapters throughout the country. In addition to the quarterly newsletter, **Newsbriefs,** LDA produces the biannual **Learning Disabilities Multidisciplinary Journal,** and annually sponsors a professional, international conference. There is an annual membership fee, which includes a newsletter subscription.

National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD)
381 Park Avenue South, Suite 1420
New York, NY 10016
(212) 545-7510
(212) 545-9665 (Fax)

NCLD, established in 1977, is a national not-for-profit organization committed to improving the lives of individuals with learning disabilities. Its services include: raising public awareness and understanding, national information and referral, educational programs, and legislative advocacy. NCLD produces educational tools, including an annual magazine called **THEIR WORLD,** newsletters, and a five-part video series entitled **We Can Learn.** NCLD's referral, through a computerized database and trained volunteers and staff, links parents, professionals and others concerned with LD and those

who can help them. Memberships are available to the public, which entitles individuals and organizations to receive a special packet of information on LD, as well as regular updates on LD.

National Network of Learning Disabled Adults (NNLDA)
800 N. 82nd Street
Scottsdale, AZ 85257
(602) 941-5112

NNLDA is an organization run by and for people who have learning disabilities. A free newsletter and list of self-help groups is available. Please send a stamped envelope for mail responses.

Orton Dyslexia Society
The Chester Building, Suite 382
8600 LaSalle Road
Baltimore, MD 21286-2044
(410) 296-0232
(800) 222-3123
(410) 321-5069 (Fax)

The Orton Dyslexia Society is an international non-profit organization concerned with the complex issues of dyslexia, a specific learning disability. The Society promotes effective teaching approaches and related clinical educational intervention strategies, supports and encourages interdisciplinary study and research, and is committed to dissemination of research through conferences, publications, and 43 volunteer branches staffed by professionals. Guidelines are available for the College Affiliate Program, a network of support groups for students with dyslexia on college campuses.

Standardized Test Administrators

College Board
SAT Services for Students with Disabilities
P.O. Box 6226
Princeton, NJ 08541-6226
(609) 771-7137
(609) 882-4118 (TT)
(609) 771-7681 (Fax)

Through its Admissions Testing Program, the College Board provides special arrangements to minimize the possible effects of disabilities on test performance. Two plans are available. Plan A (Special Accommodations) is for students with documented hearing, learning, physical, and/or visual disabilities. It permits special test editions, special answer sheets, extended testing time, aids, and flexible test dates. Plan B, which offers extended time only, is for those with documented learning disabilities. Plan B permits additional testing time for the SAT and TSWE (Test of Standard Written English). Call or write for **Information for Students with Special Needs**, or **Information for Counselors and Admissions Officers**.

ACT Test Administration
P.O. Box 4028
Iowa City, IA 52243-4028
(319) 337-1332
(319) 337-1701 (TT)
(319) 337-1285 (Fax)

ACT (American College Testing) will arrange for individual administration of assessments for students with physical or perceptual disabilities, given proper documentation of the disability. Individual administrations may be approved, for example, for those who can not take the tests within the allotted time using regular-type test booklets, or for those who need to use large-type or audiocassette versions of the tests. For further information, call or write for a **Request for Special Testing**.

Commercially Available Guides to College Programs for Students with Learning Disabilities

Peterson's Colleges with Programs for Students with Learning Disabilities (Fourth Edition, 1994), edited by Charles T. Mangrum II and Stephen S. Strichart, is a comprehensive guide to over 800 colleges and universities in the United States and Canada, including two-year, four-year, and graduate programs. Available for $31.95, plus $6.75 shipping and handling, from Peterson's Guides, P. O. Box 2123, Princeton, NJ 08543-2123. (800) 338-3282.

The K & W Guide to Colleges for the Learning Disabled (Third Edition, 1995), edited by Marybeth Kravets and Imy F. Wax, analyzes more than 200 colleges around the United States that offer programs and services specifically geared to students with learning disabilities. Available for $28.00, plus $3.00 shipping and handling, from Educators Publishing Service, Inc., 31 Smith Place, Cambridge, MA 02138-1000. (800) 225-5750.

The two guides listed above are often available in local bookstores and libraries.

Information about Tech Prep Programs

Tech Prep, by Bettina A. Lankard (1991) . Digest No. 108. ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education.

centerfocus (number 5/June 1994) features *Emerging Tech Prep Models: Promising Approaches to Educational Reform*. This is a publication of the NCRVE, National Center for Research in Vocational Education at 2150 Shattuck Avenue, Suite 1250, Berkeley, CA 94704. (800) 762-4093.

Information about Legal Issues

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 is monitored by the Family Policy Compliance Office, U.S. Department of Education, 600 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20202-4605. (202) 260-3887 (voice) or (202) 260-8956 (TT).

The Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) has published a number of books about legal issues, including **Subpart E: Impact of Section 504 on Postsecondary Education**, by Jane Jarrow; **Title by Title: The ADA and Its Impact on Postsecondary Education**, by Jane Jarrow; and **Issues in Higher Education and Disability Law**, by Jeanne Kincaid, Esq. and Jo Anne Simon, Esq. Each book is available for $35 ($20 for AHEAD members). AHEAD, P.O. Box 21192, Columbus, OH 43221. (614) 488-4972 (voice and TT).

Additional materials from HEATH.

Please contact HEATH for a full **Publications List**. Selected relevant materials are listed below.

Access to the Science and Engineering Lab and Classroom

Financial Aid for Students with Disabilities

How to Choose a College – Guide for the Student with a Disability

Learning Disabled Adults in Postsecondary Education

Measuring Student Progress in the Classroom

National Resources for Adults with Learning Disabilities

Summer Pre-College Programs for Students with Learning Disabilities

Two Brochures: The ADA / Section 504 – The Law and Its Impact on Postsecondary Education

Vocational Rehabilitation Services – A Postsecondary Student Consumer Guide

Spring 1995.

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